

Ground-breaking new tea partnership to tackle abuse and trafficking in Indian tea communities

A ground-breaking new partnership to improve opportunities for tens of thousands of children in communities growing some of the world's favourite tea and reduce their vulnerability to trafficking and abuse, are announced today by UNICEF and the Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP).

The 3-year programme supported and funded by IDH the Sustainable Trade Initiative; ETP members, Tesco, OTG (Meßmer), Tata Global Beverages (Tetley, Tata Tea), and Taylors of Harrogate (Yorkshire Tea); and Typhoo, will initially work with 350 communities on over 100 estates in three districts in the Indian state of Assam, and has the potential to serve as a model to protect children across other rural communities.

UK supermarket Tesco has played a leading role in bringing together the coalition of organisations behind the programme as part of its ongoing commitment to improve conditions across its supply chains. Tesco is the first international retailer to partner with ETP.

The partnership is the first of its kind to bring together all key stakeholders in the tea industry - public and private organisations and the supply chain – to tackle the problem of child exploitation across the sector.

Sarah Roberts, Executive Director of the ETP, said: “We want to create a thriving future for everyone involved in tea by tackling the root causes of social and environmental problems. UNICEF’s expertise will help the tea industry to build a better future for tens of thousands of children in communities growing some of the world’s favourite tea, by improving their knowledge and skills and reducing their vulnerability to violence, abuse, and exploitation. Problems such as these can’t be tackled by any one organisation on their own and we are delighted to be part of such a strong coalition”

Child protection issues are a huge challenge in India, especially in rural areas including those that grow and produce tea. More than 80 million children a year - 41% of the child population leave school without completing eight years of education. In addition 43% of girls are married before they are 18.

The exploitation and abuse of children in these communities is exacerbated by poverty, gender, caste, and a lack of education. These problems are common in the tea communities of Assam, one of the world’s most important tea growing areas whose leaves are used in almost every tea blend. A sixth of the state’s population live in these communities and they are among its most marginalised people.

In order to protect and improve the lives of children living on these tea estates, multi-stakeholder partnerships and a cross industry approach that address child exploitation are required.

UNICEF UK Executive Director David Bull said: “Children growing up in Assam’s rural tea communities face huge problems, especially girls. Many leave school early and child marriage is common. They are vulnerable to a range of threats including trafficking, exploitative and bonded labour, and physical and sexual abuse. But we can make a difference by empowering young people and strengthening child protection systems.

This programme is backed by retailers, world-famous tea brands and growers, and shows the tea industry’s determination to play its part in solving these problems. We are hugely inspired that the tea community is looking at these issues through the eyes of a child and we hope it will encourage other industries to take similar action.”

“The Indian Government passed its flagship Integrated Child Protection Scheme in 2009, which intends to create and strengthen child protection structures across the state down to village level. The scheme was passed after a decade of advocacy from UNICEF and will support all levels of the Assam government to implement the law and its focus will form the building blocks of this partnership.”

Tea communities’ knowledge of child protection will be increased through a range of work using existing structures such as village organisations and tea estates’, welfare officers and mother clubs, to help make sure that everyone understands why it is important to protect children and how they can keep them safe.

Joost Oorthuizen, Chief Executive of IDH, said: “IDH is heavily engaged in efforts to improve sustainability in the Indian tea sector through the *truste*a programme, led and supported by the Tea Board of India. We applaud the cooperation of the tea industry with UNICEF to mitigate the issue of child trafficking in Assam and are pleased to be instrumental in bringing together the different activities required to deal effectively with such a difficult issue”.

Giles Bolton, Responsible Sourcing Director for Tesco said: “The tea industry is important to Assam, and we all have a responsibility to ensure that the shocking cases of child trafficking and exploitation in some of these communities are ended.

“As a large retailer we can use our scale to help make a real difference. We’re really pleased to be supporting this programme and to be working with a range of expert partners to

ensure young people, particularly girls and their families in Assam are better able to protect themselves and have a secure future.”

ENDS

Notes for Editors

The three-year Assam programme will target families in 350 communities linked to 100 tea estates, and will specifically:

- Equip more than 25,000 girls with the knowledge and “life skills” that will help them secure a better future and reduce their vulnerability to violence, abuse and exploitation.
- Give more than 10,000 community members the knowledge and training to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.
- Make families in each community aware of children’s rights and the support they can call on to help educate and protect their children.
- Work with state and district government to improve the quality of education and the effectiveness of child protection policies to help make a sustainable difference to the lives of children now and in many years to come.

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The Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) The Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) is a not-for-profit membership organisation of tea companies and retailers that share a vision of a thriving tea industry that is socially just and environmentally sustainable. The ETP was established in 1997 and has 36 international members. The ETP has local staff in Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and China, and a London-based team. Together with a set of partner organisations, the ETP runs a range of assurance, producer support, and strategic programmes to improve the sustainability of the tea sector, the lives and livelihoods of tea workers and smallholder farmers, and the environment in which tea is produced.

UNICEF: UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere. UNICEF UK raises funds for UNICEF’s emergency and development work and advocates for lasting change for children everywhere. We are a UK registered charity, supported entirely by voluntary

donations. We do not receive any money from the UN. For more information, please visit unicef.org.uk

IDH, the Sustainable Trade Initiative, is a non-profit organization bringing together front-running companies, civil society organizations and governments in public private partnerships to transform markets towards sustainable production and consumption. Founded in 2008 with a match-funding grant from the Dutch government and recently the Swiss government, IDH operates in 18 commodity sectors ranging from coffee to aquaculture. With its partners, IDH develops, implements, co-funds and monitors up-scaling and mainstreaming innovative business models to make sustainability the norm. www.idhsustainabletrade.com